

who needs a heart (when a heart can be broken?) by OneDreamADay

Series: [human nature \[4\]](#)

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Relationships: Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers & Karen Wheeler, Karen Wheeler & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Karen Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

Joyce Byers will not give up looking for her son. Karen Wheeler has never given up looking for her son.

(RoleSwap AU)

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Karen knows the weeks and months after her son's disappearance, her relationship with Nancy suffers, more so than with Ted.

But all she can focus on is her heartache. It hurts so much not knowing what happened to her son; no one can give her answers and her mind keeps her up at night playing the worst case scenarios of what might be happening with Micheal.

But then she finds out that the police have called off a live search and instead they've taken to a body search; that Micheal could be-

-that he could be-

-discarded like garbage, in the woods somewhere-

It's a thought that haunts her nightmare every time she sleeps. It's worse than the dreams she has where her son is with them, having never been kidnapped.

When she wakes from those dreams, it's hard to get out of bed.

It's like a constant black cloud is hanging over Karen's head.

She wants to get out of bed some days, not lie there as Nancy attempts to cook dinner and gets phone calls from Ted saying that he'll be late for dinner, don't wait for him.

Nancy doesn't say anything about that, even though she's clearly upset by it and she puts on a brave face when Karen asks her about it.

There are times when Karen thinks her daughter is a lot stronger than what she gives her credit for and she doesn't think she's ever told Nancy that.

It's on the second day of Will's disappearance when there's a knock on the door. Joyce opens it to see Karen Wheeler there, holding a casserole dish in her hand.

"I, um, brought you something. It's, um, a cherry delight. I'm sure you have enough casseroles. I know I did..."

There's an awkward silence for a moment before Joyce comes to her senses and invites Karen in for a cup of coffee.

Once at the table, Joyce takes a moment before asking "How did you deal with it, over the years?"

Karen looks surprised that she's cut to the point this fast. "It..it wasn't easy. Honestly, having Nancy helped, you know. She...gave me focus, most days. It was like, I have another child who needs she, so I can't just sit down and cry. It was hard though. Some days, I couldn't even get out the bed."

Joyce sniffs, wiping at her eyes. "All I can think about is if Will's okay if he's safe. I just want my boy home."

Karen takes a hold of Joyce's hands and squeezes in a comforting manner. "I know, Joy, I know."

Though Karen never says it out loud, just seeing Will's missing poster makes her think of Micheal to the point where she wants to go back home, and wait for this to end.

But she knows that out of everyone in this small town, she's the only one that knows exactly what Joyce is going through.

The Christmas lights flicker on and off rapidly and when Karen gives the other woman a confused look and asks why they're up in the first place, Joyce takes a deep breath. "It might sound weird, but I swear it's the truth."

"So tell me."